UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTIETH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
21st meeting
held on
Wednesday, 8 November 1995
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/50/SR.21
7 December 1995
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

95-82101 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/50/3, 12 and Add.1, 413, 414, 555, A/50/275-S/1995/555)

1. Mr. WALDEN (Israel) observed that the existence of 28 million refugees, displaced persons and returnees in the world showed the inability of the international community to meet the expectations embodied for the past 50 years in the Charter. When conflict resolution failed, the need arose for humanitarian intervention to minimize the ensuing human disaster. The activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) played a central role in the spectrum of humanitarian assistance afforded by the international community, alongside the efforts of such bodies as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and many non-governmental organizations.

2. Israel had a high regard for the way in which UNHCR had grappled with the immense problems posed by the conflicts that had risen in Africa and in the former Yugoslavia, and in other regions, despite the limited resources available and the dangers to which its emissaries had been exposed. While the situation in Burundi and Rwanda remained an immediate challenge, developments in Mozambique, Angola and Liberia were encouraging. Where the former Yugoslavia was concerned, recent developments justified a degree of cautious optimism about resolving the conflict. Regarding the three different strategies of "preparedness", "prevention" and "solutions", his delegation held that UNHCR could make a contribution above all in the areas of preparedness, namely, the ability to respond rapidly to emergencies, and of solutions, namely, finding durable solutions to refugee flows. The area of prevention, namely, tackling the root causes of conflict, went well beyond the scope of UNHCR.

3. Certainly, the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees must continue to play a key role in resolving the refugee problem. At the same time, the work of UNHCR must not be hampered by excessive stress on formal distinctions between refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and others, which were bound to distort the reality of masses of people rendered homeless as a result of conflicts in which they had played the merely passive role of victim. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, UNHCR had been providing assistance to the categories of refugees mentioned but also to those under direct threat of expulsion or "ethnic cleansing". A more realistic and adequate categorization was required to facilitate the Office's operations. Moreover, special attention needed to be given to vulnerable subgroups. For that reason, Israel welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors (A/50/555), as well as the collaboration of UNHCR with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ICRC, non-governmental organizations and Governments in dealing with that problem. Similar special attention should be paid to the problems of refugee women.

4. The State of Israel had since its establishment absorbed more than 2.5 million immigrants from all over the world. Its experience in absorption techniques, including the establishment of absorption centres, residential and

educational facilities, financial assistance, free medical care and the like could be of value to all countries and intergovernmental organizations confronting problems of large-scale immigrant absorption. Israel was willing to place at the disposal of the international community its experience in the training of skilled personnel to handle the absorption of immigrants like the programmes operated by its Ministry of Immigration and Absorption, as well as in the establishment of communication centres to coordinate the work of agencies involved in assistance to immigrants and of research centres on immigration issues.

5. Ms. BURROWS (Canada) noted that UNHCR had called upon all States to uphold asylum as the key instrument of refugee protection, and to resist, despite continuing crises, the erosion of the principles on which protection was based. The basis of the international refugee protection system continued to be the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Yet it was evident that the idea of protection required constant reinterpretation as individuals and entire populations found themselves in jeopardy. UNHCR was playing a vital leadership role in identifying the limitations of the system of international protection and searching for new ways of providing protection to all who needed it. Canada welcomed the Executive Committee's request that UNHCR should organize informal consultations to develop guiding principles, drawing on fundamental protection principles found in existing international instruments.

6. With respect to the particular needs of refugee women, the Beijing Platform for Action produced by the Fourth World Conference on Women would inspire the Office's planning and the hope was that adequate resources would be allocated for activities in that area. The Executive Committee had, at Canada's suggestion, called upon the High Commissioner to promote and support national efforts to put into practice the principle that women's rights were human rights and that sexual violence and other gender-related persecution could be grounds for refugee status under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

7. In the area of refugee protection, Canada had had good experience with resettlement, an important instrument of protection and a durable solution in some circumstances. Resettlement must be given a proper and effective place in the international response to the refugee problem. Public confidence was needed to maintain generous asylum policies, and that in turn depended on the efficacy of the process of determining refugee status. Canada remained committed to ensuring that asylum procedures were focused on their primary purpose of identifying refugees entitled to receive protection under the terms of the Convention. It also supported the role of UNHCR in advising Governments on ways of formulating their citizenship laws so as to prevent the creation of stateless persons.

8. Canada further noted the High Commissioner's call for a new protection paradigm involving a more active promotion of the conditions allowing for the repatriation and reintegration of refugees as the only viable solution for the vast majority of them. His Government supported the comprehensive strategies adopted in various regions to help the countries concerned to meet their obligations to admit and protect refugees, prevent forcible displacement and provide for durable solutions through the safe return of their own citizens. It was necessary to improve the effectiveness of international institutions and to

institute major reforms to strengthen the coordination of international humanitarian assistance. Canada welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding signed between UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) and one soon to be signed between UNHCR and UNICEF, because they were desirable means of coordination and the achievement of greater efficiency. Similarly, there should be cooperation in helping the Department of Humanitarian Affairs carry out its mandate.

9. Although many donor countries were suffering from fiscal constraints, Canada had been able to maintain its level of contributions to the general programmes of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at the same level as the previous year. But in a period of budget restrictions, all agencies, including UNHCR, must concentrate on achieving maximum efficiency and on streamlining and minimizing administrative budgets, while at the same time promoting accountability, performance and strategic planning, which were the bases of operational effectiveness. It was also important to achieve the most sound arrangements possible with implementing partners, who performed invaluable services for the international community. Canada suggested that the United Nations system should devise a common approach to establishing contractual relationships with non-governmental organizations.

10. Mr. KIRKLAND (United States of America) said that he recognized the need for political solutions in order to resolve humanitarian crises. In the case of one of the longest lasting and most complex humanitarian emergencies of the 1990s, that in the former Yugoslavia, the United States hoped that the talks held in Dayton, Ohio, would lead to political reconciliation between the parties and would initiate a new phase which would include the area of international activities. Displaced persons would be able to return to their home communities and, later, the refugees receiving temporary protection in Western Europe would be able to return, although further population movements would result from the redrawing of the map of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Resettlement in third countries would be the best solution for especially vulnerable people from the former Yugoslavia. The United States had pledged to provide resettlement in its territory for as many as 50 per cent of those considered by UNHCR to be in need. To date, his country had provided permanent resettlement for over 19,000 Bosnian refugees. During the last four years, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had valiantly led the international humanitarian response to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. The United States supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that UNHCR should retain its role as lead humanitarian agency in the period following the settlement of the conflict.

11. Every year, UNHCR worked to find lasting solutions, of which repatriation was the most effective if political circumstances permitted it. In that regard, the Government of the United States was gratified by the progress in Mali and Togo and, above all, the prospects for true peace in Liberia which would enable millions of displaced persons in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia itself to return to their homes. With regard to the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, which was in its final phase, the United States firmly believed that a voluntary return to their home communities was the only option for those remaining in camps in South-East Asia who did not qualify as refugees. After returning to Viet Nam, some might be able to emigrate abroad under the criteria established by individual countries. The United States was prepared to establish a new bilateral programme that would offer future

repatriates the opportunity to be interviewed in Viet Nam for possible resettlement in the United States. The Comprehensive Plan of Action set a major precedent in dealing with a crisis at the regional level, taking into account the interests of all affected Governments and of the refugees themselves and in accordance with international humanitarian principles.

12. In the Great Lakes region of central Africa, further progress must be made towards a regional solution, which must include the participation of all the affected countries. The United States had been encouraged by reports indicating that over 50,000 refugees had returned to Rwanda during the past few months and that UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), non-governmental organizations and the Rwandan Government had offered their cooperation in preparing a repatriation plan for the refugees. With regard to the international conference on migration and refugee issues in the Commonwealth of Independent States which was being organized by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United States was very impressed by the thoroughness of the preparations and by the skill of the organizers in handling the complex problems of migration in the region and their sensitivity to political problems. His country hoped that the secretariat of the conference would continue its good work and would encourage the cooperation of knowledgeable non-governmental organizations and other independent groups, especially those in the States of the region.

13. The United States commended the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Executive Director of WFP in seeking management reforms to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and seamlessness of programmes on the ground. The emergency preparedness measures adopted by WFP and UNHCR had made it possible to cope with the situation which had developed in August as a result of the expulsion of 200,000 Serbs from the Krajina area of the former Yugoslavia without any kind of emergency appeal. Given the importance of coordinating emergency responses, the effectiveness, efficiency and seamlessness of United Nations inter-agency operations should be used as guides to judging performance. The coordinated efforts of WFP and UNHCR would serve as a model in that regard.

14. With regard to the long series of international conferences on population, social issues and women, it was time to apply the energy which had been invested in preparing those global policies to practical cases. UNHCR had reason to be proud of its work in policy development on protection of refugee women and children and of its policy to examine the condition of the refugees themselves, using the resources, needs and desires of the refugees as guides in designing projects and to ensure that the most vulnerable among them had access to the necessary protection and assistance. UNHCR and the governmental and non-governmental organizations must now work to apply those policies world wide. With regard to the report on assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors (A/50/555), he said that the United States had always supported programmes to increase protection for unaccompanied refugee children and that it was pleased to note that the report mentioned the creation of a regional support unit for refugee children in the Great Lakes area. The United States had donated $650,000 to that project in 1995 and hoped that the same approach would be taken in the upcoming repatriations to Angola and Liberia.

15. With regard to refugee protection, the United States reaffirmed its support of UNHCR in its efforts to provide protection to those in need and appreciated the practical cooperation provided by UNHCR in the area of protection on the American continent. Furthermore, it encouraged UNHCR to work with Governments to develop guiding principles for the provision of protection to those who fell outside the bounds of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. The issue of the resettlement of refugees, especially as a means of providing protection, was particularly important in the United States, where about 100,000 persons had been settled in the past year under the refugee admissions programme. His country viewed resettlement as an important component of the solution to the refugee problem and played a leadership role in that aspect of protection.

16. The United States paid homage to the work of the thousands of staff members of UNHCR and the non-governmental organizations, who worked tirelessly and under extreme conditions of insecurity and isolation to improve the living conditions of refugees. Their work benefited from the leadership of the High Commissioner, who had managed to retain a clear focus on the highest priorities of her office, namely, the protection and assistance of refugees, regardless of their political opinions, their location or their number.

17. Ms. TOMIČ (Slovenia) said that, throughout the previous year, large numbers of people yet again had required UNHCR assistance, thereby involving the organization in increasingly complex responsibilities. The fact that UNHCR had been required to deal with increasingly frequent emergency situations and large-scale repatriations demonstrated that, if a lasting solution was to be found, root causes of the refugee problem had to be addressed, whether they be armed conflict, economic and social deprivation or gross violations of human rights.

18. Therefore, UNHCR should continue to pursue its strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions, and introduce "service-packages" as an effective response to large-scale emergencies, such as in the Great Lakes region of Africa. It was important that UNHCR activities should be coordinated with the rest of the United Nations system. Collaboration with United Nations human rights initiatives and mechanisms was becoming an increasingly important component of both preventive and solution-oriented efforts by UNHCR. The international tribunals established for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda could also play an important role by sentencing the perpetrators of the crimes that had resulted in refugee flows, since punishing criminals would help to create the conditions for voluntary return of refugees to an environment of peace and reconciliation.

19. UNHCR preparedness had advanced significantly since 1991, and it had reached a high level in its capacity to meet emergencies. Voluntary repatriation was the ideal formula and the only viable long-term solution to the problems of refugees and displaced persons. UNHCR should play a significant role in reconciliation and rehabilitation of refugees who had returned to their homes. In cooperation with the relevant Governments, development agencies and financial institutions, it could ensure a meaningful "continuum from relief to development", thus linking humanitarian activities with programmes aimed at long-term development. That was also applicable to the ongoing efforts to achieve peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In order to create a safe

environment for the voluntary return of refugees, any peace settlement would have to take into account political, humanitarian, reconstruction, development and human rights aspects.

20. Slovenia applauded the special attention devoted by UNHCR to the needs of refugee women and children and its increased attention to environmental concerns arising in refugee situations, seeking to integrate those specific needs into all phases of the UNHCR assistance cycle. Slovenia, which harboured 20,500 refugees, principally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, acknowledged the particular relevance of those priority concerns. Women and children represented an overwhelming majority of the refugee populations, and Slovenia had devoted particular attention to children as the most vulnerable group. Slovenia had drawn up and implemented a programme of psychological help for such children, with the intention of protecting their rights and helping them to overcome their traumatic experiences.

21. In the light of the increased UNHCR budget requirements, particularly for financing emergency situations, and taking the needs of refugees in Slovenia fully into account, the Government of Slovenia had undertaken an in-depth review of the provision of humanitarian aid to refugees in its territory. A formal announcement would shortly be made regarding the Slovenian Government's decision, with effect from January 1996, to request no further financial assistance from the United Nations system to meet the humanitarian needs of the refugees temporarily residing in Slovenia.

22. Mr. PASHAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that, although the refugee population had decreased by the end of 1994, the number of persons considered to be of concern to UNHCR had increased. Far from being random, positive changes in the dynamics of refugees, displaced persons and returnees corresponded primarily to the outstanding work of UNHCR. Azerbaijan, a country of 7.5 million inhabitants, with a total of more than a million refugees and displaced persons, and with 20 per cent of its territory under occupation following the aggression by the Republic of Armenia, had experienced considerable difficulties. In addition to the problems of the economic transition and consequent impoverishment of the population, the necessity of providing assistance for refugees and displaced persons had also given rise to a large number of problems.

23. The Government of Azerbaijan had adopted significant decrees and resolutions aimed at solving the problem of refugees and displaced persons, including the "Law on the status of refugees and displaced persons", adopted on 29 September 1990, under which the State undertook to meet the most urgent needs of refugees and displaced persons, providing them with employment and with education for their children, and ensuring that they enjoyed their full rights. A total of 650,000 internally displaced persons were currently in Azerbaijan and, as stated in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, most of those displaced persons were still living in make-shift shelters, railroad carriages and dugouts.

24. According to the National Report by the Republic of Azerbaijan to the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995, over 200,000 refugees who had been forcibly deported from Armenia in 1988 had still not received compensation for damages suffered. That problem should be solved

without delay. The assistance rendered by international organizations was not enough to solve all the problems of refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan. Their labour was their principal means of survival. One problem of most refugees was that they were rural inhabitants who had been obliged to adapt to living and working in cities. By 1 January, 1995, only 91,591 people had been provided with jobs, including 43,890 women.

25. The UNHCR report drew attention to the fact that, during 1994 and the first quarter of 1995, the situation of large numbers of refugees had been resolved. Over 1.7 million refugees had returned to their country of origin, most notably to Mozambique, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Such positive developments were of great importance, since the dearest wish of a refugee or displaced person was to return home. Azerbaijan required the assistance of the relevant international legal protection organizations in solving the problem of compensation to be paid by Armenia for all forms of damage wrought in Azerbaijan. According to estimates of the Azerbaijan Statistics Committee losses resulting from the occupation totalled US$ 12.1 billion.

26. Solution of complex, refugee-producing emergencies required concerted efforts in which humanitarian activities were complemented by both political initiatives to resolve conflict and development efforts to ensure a sustainable livelihood for the most severely affected areas and people, demonstrating the importance of coordinating UNHCR activities with those of other United Nations bodies and organizations. One of the global tasks facing the United Nations on the eve of the twenty-first century was not only to adapt refugees and displaced persons to new living conditions, but also to make it possible for them to return to live in and rebuild their place of origin.

27. It was extremely important to analyse the internal displacement process, particularly in the area of the former Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan, the phenomenon of displaced persons had emerged as a result of foreign occupation. The history of humankind was rife with wars and aggressions, but people remaining in captured territories were not deprived of their means of survival. An extremely dangerous trend was emerging with the approach of the twenty-first century; local wars, particularly within the former Soviet Union, had led to ethnic cleansing and destruction of the economic, historical and cultural wealth of the occupied nation. In that context, Azerbaijan welcomed the fact that UNHCR had introduced a process to develop a comprehensive approach to the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and migrants in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and affected neighbouring States. The convening of a conference devoted to such problems, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 49/173 of 23 December 1994, should be one of the priority activities of UNHCR.

28. The people and Government of Azerbaijan wished to express their gratitude to the Governments of all States and to the numerous intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations which had rendered their generous assistance to the innocent victims of Armenian aggression. They also wished to pay tribute to the difficult and often dangerous work that UNHCR performed throughout the world, and to the noble commitment of the High Commissioner and her staff.

29. Mr. TARAR (Pakistan) said that there continued to be floods of refugees and displaced persons suffering human rights violations; such situations had not been avoided despite the end of the cold war and had developed into humanitarian emergencies. In the previous five years many parts of the world had known genocide and massive exoduses of refugees through lack of preventive action. Although considerable progress had been made in the protection, repatriation and rehabilitation of refugees, the situation was still serious in many parts of the world. The decrease in the total number of refugees in the world had been offset by the increase in the number of internally displaced persons and by the millions of people who were the victims of armed conflict and required humanitarian assistance. Despite the unprecedented proliferation of situations producing refugees, the response of UNHCR had been effective, particularly in the implementation of the strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions, in close cooperation with other bodies and agencies of the United Nations system. However, it was necessary to prevent situations which resulted in flows of refugees and to promote a culture of cooperation between the various agencies of the United Nations.

30. Important decisions had been taken at the forty-fifth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. The loss of lives in recent crises and the growing incidence of armed attacks, murders, rapes and other violations of fundamental rights and cases of refoulement continued to threaten the safety of refugees. Hundreds of thousands of people every year fled from situations of conflict and were persecuted during their flight and in the countries where they sought refuge. In that context, he welcomed the proposal of the Executive Committee to explore further measures to ensure international protection, so as to provide a pragmatic and flexible response to mass influx

31. Pakistan supported the efforts of UNHCR to ensure that asylum was granted to all those who needed it. In order to promote and protect the values of democracy and human rights, the international community should continue to preserve the principle of asylum and the procedures for granting it. In recent years, particularly in the emergencies in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, UNHCR had collaborated closely with human rights mechanisms. The increasing involvement of UNHCR in the work of the human rights treaty bodies would also help to promote and protect the rights of refugees. Pakistan fully supported the efforts of UNHCR to organize a conference to address the problems of refugees, returnees, displaced persons and migrants in the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring States.

32. Despite concerted efforts made by UNHCR to focus on women refugees, who along with children formed the bulk of the refugee population, their situation remained precarious. Pakistan welcomed the steps taken by UNHCR, particularly the creation of the new posts of regional advisers, in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, and the proposed expansion of the people-oriented planning programme. Nevertheless, despite those achievements, recent independent reports had pointed out that women in refugee camps were not getting a sufficient amount of food. Women were reportedly suffering from malnutrition and faced exploitation and suffering, basically because food was distributed by men who did not properly understand the special needs of women refugees. The solution was to increase

the representation of women and the number of women in administrative posts. Similarly, orphaned children were still vulnerable, which made it essential to intervene forcefully in order to protect them from exploitation and ensure a better future for them through education.

33. With reference to the refugees from Afghanistan, the 4 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran constituted the largest case of its kind in the world. Pakistan fully supported efforts for peace, rapprochement and reconciliation in Afghanistan which might create the necessary conditions for the repatriation and rehabilitation of the refugees and for the reconstruction of the economy. The continued fighting in Afghanistan had led to the arrival of more refugees in Pakistan, and their presence - together with the decision by UNHCR to gradually scale down the care and maintenance programme - had added a further strain to the country's limited resources and its capacity to tackle the refugee problem. UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and donor countries should therefore take a fresh look at the refugee situation in Pakistan. After thanking UNHCR for its support to Pakistan in environmental rehabilitation and acknowledging the positive results of the income-generation projects of UNHCR and the World Bank, he said that the cumulative ecological damage and environmental degradation of the previous 17 years needed to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner.

34. The half-hearted measures taken by the international community to deal with the situation of refugees in the former Yugoslavia had prolonged the misery of the people affected, as mounting evidence showed that the safe havens had become death traps for the besieged Bosnians. Pakistan commended UNHCR and WFP for bringing them humanitarian aid and trusted that the international community would concern itself with creating conditions for the return of refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The entire Bosnian population needed psychophysical support for rehabilitation, as well as massive technical and financial aid for the reconstruction of the country. The situation in Kashmir, with its successive waves of refugees from Indian-held Kashmir, was turning into a humanitarian crisis. The Neelam Valley in Azad Kashmir was completely cut off because of constant firing from the Indian side of the line of control. In conclusion, he urged the United Nations to tackle the refugee problem by making full use of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building so that humanitarian disasters could be avoided. It was the hope of Pakistan that the capacity of UNHCR would be increased and used to further alleviate the suffering of refugees.

35. Mr. MUKASA-SSALI (Uganda) said that the implementation of the provisions of the international instruments dealing with refugees was the only protection against host countries denying safe entry to refugees and refusing to take care of their basic human needs. In view of the impressive number of refugees successfully repatriated in Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia and Mozambique, the harassment and taunting of women and children during that process was unacceptable, and was incompatible with the strong commitment to those vulnerable groups made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Uganda therefore supported the rapid implementation of the new UNHCR guidelines on preventing and responding to sexual violence against refugees.

36. There was a need for agreement on a codified set of international instruments whereby the sovereignty of States and the principle of territorial jurisdiction could be balanced against the inalienable rights of internally displaced persons. At the regional Conference on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes Region, held in Bujumbura, Burundi, from 15 to 17 February 1995, a plan of action had been developed which it had not been possible to implement for various reasons. After commending the High Commissioner of UNHCR for its work in the Great Lakes region, and the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire for the generous hospitality they had extended to thousands of refugees for so long, he welcomed the arrangements for "service-packages" which allowed the airport and other logistics base services to be used.

37. The international community must ensure that the International Tribunal for Rwanda began to function, in order to see that justice was done, before beginning on the restructuring of social institutions and revitalizing of the economy. As conflict was one of the major causes of displacement of peoples, the Organization of African Unity had instituted a mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution, as part of its regional peacemaking initiative encompassing interrelated aspects of preventive diplomacy. Uganda affirmed the relevance of the three-pronged approach to the refugee problem, namely, preparedness, prevention and solutions. It hoped that related initiatives which had been taken would act as a catalyst for long-term development and that every effort would be made to integrate them in national development plans and country programmes. Finally, Uganda commended the efforts of organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Save the Children, and emphasized the need for better coordination at the local level to derive the greatest benefit from their activities.

38. Mr. AHMED (India) said that India, as a new member of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, wished to place on record its deep appreciation and support for the exemplary work being carried out by the High Commissioner and her Office. Great care must be taken not to overload the Office; the objective should be to strengthen the structure of UNHCR in a realistic way in order to ensure that it would be able to carry out its existing activities. India fully supported the need for global efforts to address the entire range of refugee-related problems, including enhancing security and predictability of protection, international solidarity and burden-sharing, and the effective reintegration of refugees. Proposed reintegration criterion of UNHCR which stressed the role of women was important, and UNHCR efforts to work with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in that area deserved complete support. The basic human rights of refugees must be addressed in conformity with uniform universal norms.

39. It was noteworthy that in recent years UNHCR had been called upon to define more complex refugee situations, including that of internally displaced persons. It should be underlined that, when assistance was required in such cases, the consent of the State concerned was an important prerequisite. A candid and realistic appraisal of such situations in their totality was also necessary in order to avoid political partisanship. It was also important that humanitarian

non-governmental organizations adhere strictly to their non-partisan and non-political mandates so that Governments would continue cooperating with them. The accountability of non-governmental organizations actively involved in the humanitarian field went hand in hand with their mandated responsibilities.

40. Since its independence, India had received millions of refugees, allowing them to practise their own cultures, traditions, languages and religions and set up their own schools with funding from the Government. It had always been India's policy that repatriation should be strictly and entirely on a voluntary basis, and to that end India had sought to negotiate bilateral agreements such as the ones negotiated with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He noted with interest the initiative to develop a concerted strategy to address issues concerning refugees in the Commonwealth of Independent States and neighbouring States, and to identify, in particular, the types of refugees and related movements in that region. The need for burden-sharing between the United Nations, the donors and the host country could not be stressed enough. It was a matter of concern that the institution of asylum was under threat and becoming more restrictive precisely because of resource constraints. The main causes for population displacements and refugee flows were hunger, poverty and environmental degradation. With that in mind, it was important to note that, as the Secretary-General had stated in his report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/50/413), development was the basic solution to the refugee problem.

41. Mrs. EL GHABSHAWY (Sudan) said that over the preceding 30 years the Sudan had received more than 1 million refugees, to whom it had provided every kind of assistance, such as access to employment, education, medical care, and even farmland with a view to their integration. It had also facilitated in every way their repatriation or voluntary return. All that had been done despite the country's economic problems and the fact that the influx of refugees had doubled demands on its infrastructure. Although the international community had never failed to provide assistance for the refugees, it was a source of concern that recently the international community had begun to gradually reduce that assistance.

42. It was important that international assistance should not be reduced, because the economic situation in some host countries such as the Sudan was beginning to be unsustainable. In the view of the Sudan, the current allocation of resources for refugee programmes was unfair, whatever the criteria and reasoning might be. It believed that, by allocating large sums to certain countries, the contributor countries reduced UNHCR financial resources and hindered the chances of fair and impartial distribution of UNHCR assistance. Therefore, UNHCR itself should allot all funds directly. The methods for distributing international assistance should be modified radically so as to be free of political considerations. Host countries which lacked sound economic structures could not assume that burden of responsibility on behalf of the international community.

43. For that reason, the Sudan was revising its open-door policy to take into account new changes on the international scene and the interests of the Sudanese people. If the international community did not increase the resources allocated to the Sudan for refugees, the country would face an emergency situation which

would oblige it to reconsider the policy that had led it to assume that burden in the past. As a result of the constitutional changes in the Sudan, which had granted total autonomy to the existing 26 federal states, the status of the refugees could be affected if the international community did not adopt urgent measures to provide more support to the States in which the majority of the refugees were concentrated, especially since in many cases they had overloaded the country's already limited economic capacity. The special situation of the refugees in Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa, must be analysed to take into account the political changes and the scanty resources in that region. In many international meetings, the Sudan had stressed the need to hold a regional conference on the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the Horn of Africa, like other meetings held on the same issue in various regions of the world.

44. Reports that the Sudan was restricting the freedom of movement of Eritrean refugees in the eastern part of the country and that their human rights were being threatened were, she declared, unfounded. At times a country was obliged to adopt precautionary measures in its national interest or for security reasons, as provided for in international law. The Sudan had always expressed its reservations concerning freedom of movement for the refugees, based on the principle of the sovereignty of States. The Sudan was willing to receive impartial missions which would determine the real situation concerning the refugees' freedom of movement. The best solution to the refugee problem was voluntary repatriation. The Sudan had negotiated a tripartite agreement with Ethiopia and UNHCR for the repatriation of 350,000 Ethiopians, and hoped that sufficient funds would be allocated to complete that programme, which had already permitted the repatriation of 27,000 Ethiopians. In addition, thanks to a bilateral agreement with UNHCR in an experimental programme, 25,000 of the more than 500,000 Eritrean refugees in the Sudan had been repatriated.

45. Referring to the Secretary-General's report on assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors (A/50/555), submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/172, she thanked the Secretary-General and the bodies concerned for their efforts to gather information, although the report had not lived up to expectations since it only contained statistical information and general data and did not suggest ways to alleviate the suffering of those children or reunite them with their families. She pointed out that the resolution mentioned above had been adopted on an initiative of the Sudan, motivated by its concern for the situation of more than 20,000 children who had been sequestered by the insurgent movement in the south of the country, which used them as explosives carriers, human shields in minefields and as a military reserve, a situation which was intolerable since it violated religious and humane principles. For those reasons, the Sudan called on UNHCR to endeavour to protect those children in accordance with its Guidelines on Refugee Children, to carry out a census of unaccompanied minors and to indicate in which camps they were to be found so that the Sudanese authorities could visit them, since their safety was the responsibility of the Sudan.

46. It would also be a good idea to establish an international programme of voluntary repatriation as part of the Sudan's voluntary repatriation programme so that all Sudanese refugees located in neighbouring countries could return home. The Sudan was prepared to receive them and to create economic and social

conditions that would allow them to lead normal lives. Following repatriation, it was important that receiving countries, especially those which had had to deal with the prolonged presence of refugees, should be compensated in some way for damage to their environment, the negative impact on their basic structures and the depletion of their natural resources.

47. Her delegation could not agree with the view that the High Commissioner's mandate should be extended to cover persons who had been displaced inside their own country and migrants. In that context he referred to chapter II, article 6, of the Statute of UNHCR (General Assembly resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950) which laid down the categories of persons who fell within the Office's mandate and did not include the aforementioned groups. Since UNHCR had experienced serious economic problems in dealing with all the refugees in its care, it would be unable to take on the additional burden of persons displaced inside their own country, for example, who were the sole responsibility of the Government concerned.

AGENDA ITEM 108: INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL (continued) (A/C.3/50/L.14)

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.14

48. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.14, entitled "International action to combat drug abuse and illicit production of trafficking", and said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

49. Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico) announced that Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Guyana, Malta, Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa and Suriname had become sponsors of the draft resolution.

50. The CHAIRMAN announced that Bangladesh, Barbados, Cyprus, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Senegal and Swaziland had also become sponsors of the draft resolution.

51. Ms. BUCK (Canada) said that her delegation had had some misgivings about earlier versions of the draft resolution which had made reference to the holding of world conferences to combat drugs. However, following lengthy negotiations skilfully conducted by the Mexican delegation, the version of the draft resolution which the Committee currently had before it stated that the proposal to convene a second international conference to combat drugs would be submitted directly to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs for consideration. In the light of those changes, her delegation was pleased to announce that it would join in sponsoring the draft resolution.

52. Mr. JONES (United States of America) drew attention to section IV of the draft resolution, relating to the proposal to convene an international conference. Although his delegation did not intend to call for a recorded vote on the draft resolution, it could not endorse the proposal. Moreover, when the matter came up for discussion in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, pursuant to the draft resolution, his delegation would oppose the convening of such a conference. Delegations would recall that, in his statement during the general debate at the current session of the General Assembly, the United States

Secretary of State had called for a moratorium on major international conferences because the United States Government believed that the Organization's resources should be devoted to helping the most needy Member States and not to convening world conferences whose purposes and objectives were far from clear. The United States Government believed that an effective legal and policy framework for international cooperation on narcotic drugs had already been put in place. Therefore, rather than convene another conference on narcotic drugs, he once again urged all Member States which had not yet done so to ratify the various relevant instruments and to enact the national legislation necessary to implement them. The high-level meeting on drug control to be held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in 1996 would provide the international community with an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to drug control and, to the extent necessary, give it new direction. At a time of budgetary austerity it was necessary to utilize effectively existing multilateral forums for improving cooperation on all aspects of drug control.

53. Lastly, his delegation wished to make a clarification with regard to the statement made on 30 October 1995 by the representative of Thailand on the subject of drug control. That statement had misrepresented the facts relating to United States policy and activities in the field of drug control. The United States firmly intended to combat the scourge of drugs, in accordance with international agreements and its own domestic law. It regretted that the representative of Thailand did not share the common objective of putting a stop to illicit drug traffiking in view of the long tradition of cooperation that existed between the two countries in the field of international drug control.

54. Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.14 was adopted without a vote.

55. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 108.

AGENDA ITEM 105: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued) (A/C.3/50/L.2 and L.10)

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.2

56. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.2, entitled "International Year for Older Persons: towards a society for all ages", and noted that, in its resolution 1995/21, the Economic and Social Council had recommended it for adoption by the General Assembly. The draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

57. Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.2 was adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.10

58. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.10, entitled "Follow-up to the International Year of the Family", and said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

59. Ms. NEWELL (Secretary of the Committee) read out two revisions that had been made to the draft resolution: in paragraph 2, "by 1996" should be replaced by "before the end of 1995". In paragraph 5 (b), the word "comprehensive" should be inserted after the words "To prepare a".

60. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Dominican Republic no longer wished to be included on the list of sponsors of the draft resolution, but that Austria, Guinea, Madagascar, Nigeria, the Philippines, the Republic of Moldova and Rwanda wished to become sponsors.

61. Ms. WOERGETTER (Austria) announced that Costa Rica also wished to become a sponsor of the draft resolution.

62. Mr. NOGUERA (Guatemala) said that, while his delegation had joined the consensus on the draft resolution, he wished to place on record that he was unable to accept the third preambular paragraph, which contained a reference to "various forms of family". Guatemala recognized no other form of family except that which resulted from the consensual union of a man and a woman.

63. Mrs. KABA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that her delegation was prepared to join the consensus, provided it was clear that the use of the term "various forms of family" did not represent an attempt to gain acceptance for certain forms of family that had already been rejected in other forums, such as the Fourth World Conference on Women. In the view of her delegation, the family was composed of a father, a mother and children.

64. Mr. OTUYELU (Nigeria) said that his delegation was a sponsor of the draft resolution, but that the use of the term under discussion did not mean that his Government accepted various forms of family; it understood the family as being the unit made up of a father, a mother and children.

65. Mrs. D'ALVAREZ (Dominican Republic) explained that her delegation had withdrawn its sponsorship from the draft resolution because, contrary to what had been agreed previously, the text included a reference to "various forms of family", a term to which her delegation objected. Nevertheless, it would join in the consensus because it was in agreement with the remainder of the draft resolution.

66. Mr. AL-SAEID (Kuwait) said that his delegation could not endorse the wording used in the third preambular paragraph with regard to the existence of various forms of families in different cultural, political and social systems. The foundation of the family was the union of man and woman.

67. Mrs. LIMJUCO (Philippines) said that in becoming a sponsor of the draft resolution, her delegation was only supporting the concept of the family as the basic unit of society made up of a man, a woman and children.

68. Mr. WISSA (Egypt) said it was his delegation's understanding that the content of the third preambular paragraph of the draft resolution was consistent with the terms used in that context at the international conferences which had dealt with the question, namely, that the family was based on the union of man and woman.

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69. Mr. MEKDAD (Syrian Arab Republic) said that although his delegation had joined the consensus, that did not mean that it accepted any other form of family than that which consisted of a man, a woman and children.

70. Mr. AL-TAEE (Oman) said he agreed with the views expressed by other delegations on the question; his delegation could not support the reference in the draft resolution to various forms of families.

71. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that the terms used in drafting the third preambular paragraph were based on agreements reached at previous conferences. It was on that understanding that his delegation had joined in sponsoring the draft resolution.

72. Mrs. BENNANI (Morocco) said she wished to reiterate her country's position, which was that the family resulted from the union of a man and a woman.

73. Mr. NAJEM (Lebanon) expressed reservations regarding the third preambular paragraph of the draft resolution. Lebanon recognized only the natural family, namely, the family composed of man and wife.

74. Mr. OULD MOHAMED LEMINE (Mauritania) said that he could not endorse the wording used in the draft resolution. His delegation recognized only the traditional form of family, comprising a man, a woman and their children.

75. Mr. SAHRAOUI (Algeria) said he had joined the consensus because the text had been accepted at several conferences and had the same meaning it had had at those conferences, which was understood by all.

76. Mrs. SETYAWATI (Indonesia) said that her delegation understood the family to be the nucleus consisting of man, wife and children.

77. Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.10, as orally revised, was adopted without a vote.

78. Mr. BARRETO (Peru), explaining his position, said that he had joined the consensus, but wished to reiterate the reservation made by his delegation at the Cairo and Beijing Conferences. Peruvian legislation protected and promoted marriage as a natural institution and as the foundation of society. Family and marriage originated, essentially, with the personal relationship established between a man and a woman.

79. Mr. PACE (Malta) said his interpretation of paragraph 1 was that "gender equality" should mean "free from any discrimination based on sex".

80. Mrs. WAHBI (Sudan) said that her delegation had joined the consensus, recognizing the importance of the family as the nucleus of society on which the community was built. The Sudan acknowledged only one kind of family, namely, the one consisting of the husband, the legitimate wife and the legitimate children, who constituted the structure of a unified society. Consequently, she wished to make a reservation with regard to the third preambular paragraph.

81. Mr. HAMIDA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his delegation had joined the consensus and wished to reiterate that the family was the basic unit of society. With regard to the third preambular paragraph, his delegation's position was that the family was created through the legitimate marriage of a man and a woman according to the law, religion and tradition; his Government did not recognize any other family structure. Paragraph 3, which referred to the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the International Year of the Family, did not imply approval of the proposals, which would be discussed in other bodies before they received final approval.

82. Mrs. VADIATIA (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her delegation wished to express a reservation to the third preambular paragraph since, in its view, the family was established by marriage between a man and a woman.

83. Mr. AL-RASSI (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation had a reservation to the third preambular paragraph because it understood the family to be made up of a man, a woman and children.

84. Mrs. HERNANDEZ-VALVERDE (Costa Rica), referring to the third preambular paragraph, said that her delegation accepted the expression "various forms of family" only because households headed by women were a reality that was becoming more and more common in Costa Rican society.

85. Mrs. MALDONADO (Bolivia), said that her delegation had joined the consensus and held the view that the family was made up of a man, a woman and their children.

86. Mrs. ARGUETA (El Salvador) said that she had joined the consensus without prejudice to the reservations entered at the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo and the concept of family set forth in the legislation of her country.

87. Mr. AL-MAHMOUD (Qatar) said that his delegation also had a reservation with regard to the third preambular paragraph of the draft resolution.

88. Mr. AL ALI (United Arab Emirates) said that he, too, wished to enter a reservation with regard to the third preambular paragraph.

89. Mr. BOGOREH (Djibouti) said that his delegation had the same reservation as others with regard to the last part of the third preambular paragraph. It understood the family to be made up of a man, a woman and their children.

90. Mr. ALAIDROOS (Yemen) said that his delegation had joined the consensus but wished to enter a reservation with regard to the third preambular paragraph. His delegation understood the family to have its basis in the legitimate union of a man and a woman.

91. Monsignor MALLOY (Observer for the Holy See) expressed his delegation's reservation with regard to the third preambular paragraph. It understood the family to be based on the marriage of a man and a woman, according to the definition stated at previous international conferences.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.